I awake to a sloppy wetness warming my downstairs. My flaccid sex is being rolled by soft tongue and pulled taut by firm lips. I exhale with a clench of my stomach. I clamp my eyes shut. In my mind, thunder rolls.

Why am I thinking about my father? Why now, of all times, think of him? The answer is there, pressing the dam, yet to breach.

With every heartbeat, I swell, and the mouth responds. The darkness has sucked the colour out of everything. The gold of my Mr Gay UK medal, framed on the wall, is like a chunk of charcoal, hanged. The red sheets grey like the sea at the window, so he swims beneath with the head bobbing up and down.

I am plunged into an ice bath of memory, tipped backwards from a chair, that falling motion that stops my heart. I am in a room. Like this one. Grey, sucked off colour. The thick busy fingers on my infant body.

Now, the teeth are sharp and gnawing. The grip of his hand on the base tightens and the head is about to burst.

“Get the fuck off me.” I heave my knee into his side. He curls with a grunt.

“What’s that for?” he says, wiping his mouth

with the back of his hand. “I thought you’d like a bit of breakfast in bed.”

“I said no.”

I leave him in the room with the door ajar. Just a sliver of the bed visible from the kitchen. He is on his back with one hand behind his head and one hand on his smug mouth.

The kitchen work top is cold when I lean against it with my naked body. There are two plates of uneaten porterhouse steaks and an open bottle of a Chateauneuf de paup.

Here we have one of the finest cuts of meat known to man, left cold in kitchen. And a bottle of sixty pound wine wasted on this faggot. That word, my father spat it

out, as if all the frustration and the disgust, the wasted love, the simmering hatred and disappointment was concentrated into that word, that poisonous pill. Faggot.

“I was just trying to be nice,” he calls from the bedroom. “Come back to bed.”

“One minute.”

“I’m hungry.”

Faggot.

I am hungry.

I try a piece of the steak but it is cold and bland. It needed more thyme in the pan, more butter based and garlic crushed. These slabs of meat are as useful as old shoes.

So I prepare the sprigs of thyme, the ramekins of salt and pepper, cloves of garlic, the stick of butter. The skillet is still coated in the juices of the porterhouses and ready to use.

“You’re very sweet,” he says, standing in the door, with my dressing gown on and open — a tattooed arm resting on the frame. “I’m not that kind of hungry. You should come back to bed so I can apologise.”

The arm on the frame is tattooed - the skin blue like shark skin. I do not know who this man is. Why he is wearing my clothes? I have kitchen head. My eyes hurt and the ear hears blood rushing. “Take it off,” I say.

“What, this?” He fingers the lapel of the gown. “If you say so,” he cooes.

“Throw it to me,” I say. I catch it with a glance of his buttocks disappearing back under the sheets.

And suddenly I realise, there is a stranger in my bed ready to rape me.

I must have left the front door open.

He crept in while I was asleep and climbed in

bed with me.

I climb into the gown and feel the safety of the fabric over my skin. I am clammy. Icy hot waves of fear run a lap of my body and finish behind my eyes.

The steaming circus of the kitchen plays out, screams of the next order and shouts of time. Where are those fucking steaks, Tony!

These top kitchens are tough.

It’s survival of the fittest.

Kill or be killed.

“Coming, chef!”

We have no steaks but we don’t tell him that. We double check the fridge but only to look as if we are doing something. Elbow to elbow with the sous chef, he growls at me, You better hurry the fuck up.

Risotto is on, potatoes are boiling, chicken will be done in five. We need to send those steaks. It’s opening night and you’re going to let them down.

“God, hurry up!” he calls. “What you doing in there?”

It came from the walk-in fridge. The sous-chef hands us a carving knife. He was always on our

side, this guy. Always looking out for us. Steaks are coming, chef! he shouts and throws me a wink.

The walk-in is a mess. Someone’s left the jack stand uncovered and there’s dessert all over the floor. We are going to have to clean it up. But first, we have to get those steaks. It’s opening night and we can’t be late on the steaks.

“Lie down, then. Are you okay? You look ill.”

Why is it always us doing all the work? They haven’t even prepared the cuts yet, how do they expect us to do it on time?

“You’re scaring me,” he says.

“It’s opening night,” we say. “We can’t be late on the steaks.”

Blood rots quickly so it’s important you get it all out of the meat by making a clean cut across the jugular then allow it to drain. Sometimes there is resistance but if done fast enough it should be peaceful. For most, it’s the noise they can’t handle. The whimpering and the squealing. Some even say they can hear actual words like: stop, what are you doing, please no, please what the fuck is going on. But it’s only your mind playing tricks on you. It’s not really allowed but you can have some fun. Plunge the knife in here and there. Be careful of the stomach though, bile spoils the meat.

Finally, there are the little twitches, the final sparks of electricity that tense random muscles. Once those have passed, the meat should be swimming in juices and ready to cut.

“How many steaks out?”

“Waiting on six!”

I make sure to remove six equal cuts, getting as close to the bone as possible. I run them to the line and fire up the skillet. Hands of blue flame engulf the pan and I shout five out on the steaks. In goes the butter and the cloves of garlic. Then I slap down the slabs of meat and the kitchen buzzes with the gorgeous sound of frying flesh. Thyme. Salt. Pepper.

I tie up my gown to guard against the spatter of molten butter. Things are happening fast and I’m eager not to disappoint chef. The chicken and the risotto are already on the pass. Flip the steaks. They only need another minute. The tops are browned to the colour of cherrywood.

One out on the steaks, chef!

A good way to test how long your meat needs to be cooked is to put your index finger to your thumb, like so, and I shape my hand into the ‘okay’ sign. Feel the meat on your thumb with your other hand. Tender, no? Yes, I reply. Now,

put your middle finger to your thumb instead. That’s medium rare. The perfect, and only way. Check your meat.

I press the backs of my fingers onto the steak and then test it against my thumb. Perfect. You never want the meat to be well done.

The kitchen is saturated with the sweet smell of the steak. I transfer the meat from the skillet to a platter and present it to the pass. But there’s no one to take it. The waiters have gone home, the clientele have left because their food didn’t come on time, the other chefs have quit and thrown their hats into the bin. The night is a failure. The restaurant is going to close and it’s all your fault. You didn’t get those steaks out on time. Try some, I bet it’s tough as tongue.

I cut off a piece and chew and chew and chew. I try to swallow but it doesn’t want to go down — it’s a horrible cut of meat and I spit it into the bin. Time to call it a day.

I stop at the threshold to my bedroom. There’s a man on my bed covered in blood, the white of his femur stands up straight. I do not know who the man is or why he is in my house. But we know that he tried to rape you. He crept into your bed and touched you. What were you

supposed to do?

It’s survival of the fittest.

Kill or be killed.